



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Joan
Ankrum, 1964 April 28

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Joan Ankrum on April 28, 1964. The interview took place in Los Angeles, California, and was conducted by Betty Lochrie Hoag McGlynn for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The original transcript was edited. In 2023 the Archives retranscribed the original audio and attempted to create a verbatim transcript. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose. Additional information from the original transcript has been added in brackets and given an -Ed. attribution.

The sound quality for this interview is poor throughout, leading to an abnormally high number of inaudible sections; the last eight minutes of the interview in particular have a distorted sound quality.

Interview

[00:00:01.91]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: It's a kind of local color, I guess.

[00:00:04.65]

JOAN ANKRUM: [Inaudible] what they want.

[00:00:06.42]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: Do they?

[00:00:06.57]

JOAN ANKRUM: Those are the things that get lost in [inaudible].

[00:00:08.10]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: Yes, uh-huh [affirmative]. Is that like folk art?

[00:00:21.24]

[Recorder stops, restarts.]

[00:00:21.74]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: April 28, 1964. This is Betty Lochrie Hoag interviewing Joan Ankrum. That's J-O-A-N, A-N-K-R-U-M at the Ankrum Galleries, 930 N La Cienega, Los Angeles. Mrs. Ankrum, I was interested in what you told me before about the artist Arthur Durston having lived in a little guest house at your mother's home in Palo Alto, is that—

[00:00:48.22]

JOAN ANKRUM: Well, no, no, he lived in the home of my mother-in-law, whose name was Ankrum.

[00:00:54.43]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: Oh, I see.

[00:00:55.35]

JOAN ANKRUM: And she is the grandmother of my nephew by marriage, who is Morris Broderson, whose career I helped develop and direct. He—Morris, is a boy who was born completely deaf without any hearing, so he has never heard speech. But he has some

percentage, a very small percentage of sound perception. He was educated in the Schools for the Deaf in Berkeley. My home was in Palo Alto. That's how you got that idea. But Morris was my nephew by marriage, you see.

[00:01:33.68]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: Oh.

[00:01:35.21]

JOAN ANKRUM: And so I didn't meet him until he was about—well, almost 14. He came to visit me. I was living in Altadena at the time. And that's when I discovered, realized from a drawing that he did that he had very—an exciting talent.

[00:01:52.57]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: Oh, he hadn't had it developed at that time? [cross talk.]

[00:01:56.89]

JOAN ANKRUM: No, it was just on his own. He'd been drawing since he was about three and a half, or four. But nobody had done much about it. Everybody was too busy making a living, or something [inaudible.]

[00:02:08.18]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: But I wonder if that disability intensified his perceptions—[inaudible] perception of his—

[00:02:12.90]

JOAN ANKRUM: Well, I think it helped. It gave him—it provided a more vital necessity for him. It was the main means of communication for him. But this first drawing really propelled me into action, you see, and I got very excited about it. And that's when I tried to contact anybody I could in the art world who could help me help him.

[00:02:40.01]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: Yeah.

[00:02:40.61]

JOAN ANKRUM: And of course, because of his deafness and his very informal and casual education, I had some problems. But he came to live with me at that time. And I was able to help him through a wonderful book that I got by Nicolaides, called *The Natural Way to Draw*. And although I'm not an artist myself, I was able to communicate with him some of the ideas, kind of the basic ideas in art. And this was very helpful, this book. So we used to draw together. And then—

[00:03:20.04]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: Where were you living at that time?

[00:03:20.90]

JOAN ANKRUM: I was living in Altadena, up on North Lake. And then I put him in a life class at the Pasadena Museum. At that time, Francis de Erdely was teaching there. He was a Hungarian artist who—

[00:03:36.34]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: Marvelous draftsman.

[00:03:37.30]

JOAN ANKRUM: Yes, great. And a wonderful teacher, and an excellent teacher for Morris. [Clears throat.] Although he didn't speak English, but Morris couldn't hear it anyway.

[00:03:46.07]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: Oh, really.

[00:03:46.44]

JOAN ANKRUM: Well, he spoke English, but with still a very heavy Hungarian accent. And at that time—but prior to this time, Morris as a boy, in his grandmother's home at 360 Mount Washington Drive in Los Angeles, this was the old family home that had been broken up into apartments. And in one of these apartments lived an English artist named Arthur Durston. And when I met him, he was just beginning to get some recognition through WPA.

[00:04:25.62]

And he had been—he was an artist who had served—I think he—I don't know whether he actually was in World War I. But he left England about the time of World War I, and studied in France. Then, because of the disapproval of his family, who had no understanding of what he was trying to do, he ran away from home. And he came to this country and he worked in a mine of some—oh, a sawmill. That was it. Lorser Feitelson can tell you more about this background, I think, than I can, because I didn't know much about the sawmill experience, because that was before I met him.

[00:05:10.77]

But at the time I met him, he had recently come from San Francisco, where he had studied at the California School of Fine Arts. And he had exhibited in San Francisco, and also in the Seattle Museum. He was a very simple man, and not particularly articulate, verbally, about his work, but a very true artist—very dedicated, no nonsense. All he wanted to do was work—paint and work. And he was very poor, and had had several years of really malnutrition. And he came—

[00:05:54.00]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: This was before the Depression?

[00:05:55.17]

JOAN ANKRUM: Yes, this was even before the Depression. And he came to Mrs. Ankrum, Senior's house, you see. And he couldn't afford to pay rent. [Telephone rings.] So she let him live there for about four years, free, but then he would help her a little bit. But he was a very sweet person, a very fine person. And at that time, Morris Broderson was just a little boy.

[00:06:23.93]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: About how old?

[00:06:24.89]

JOAN ANKRUM: Oh, he was about 10, 11, 12.

[00:06:28.53]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: He was probably really interested [inaudible].

[00:06:30.01]

JOAN ANKRUM: And he was very much interested in this artist. But at that time, he couldn't speak at all.

[00:06:37.09]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: Oh, he couldn't?

[00:06:37.23]

JOAN ANKRUM: He just had kind of guttural sounds. He used the sign language, but he didn't speak well at all. And so—

[00:06:43.68]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: Did Mr. de Erdely try to teach him at all?

[00:06:46.30]

JOAN ANKRUM: No, no, he was pretty occupied with his own work. And one day, Morris said to his grandmother, "Do you suppose Mr. Durston would draw me a painting, or draw me a picture of a church?" His grandmother, who had great respect for art and artists, said to this little boy, "Oh no, Mr. Durston is much too busy to do such a thing, you see?"

[00:07:15.16]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: Oh. [Laughs.]

[00:07:15.73]

JOAN ANKRUM: So she said, "After all, he's a great artist, and he doesn't have time for children," or something like that.

[00:07:19.98]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: Oh, poor little boy.

[00:07:20.23]

JOAN ANKRUM: She loved him, but she just didn't understand. So, one—I think it was the next day, he came into the house from playing outdoors, or something. And there on the table was a little drawing of a cathedral.

[00:07:36.00]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: Oh.

[00:07:36.66]

JOAN ANKRUM: And he never forgot [inaudible].

[00:07:37.56]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: The grandmother probably told him as soon as [inaudible]—

[00:07:40.23]

JOAN ANKRUM: Oh, yes.

[00:07:41.79]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: —must have known.

[00:07:42.24]

JOAN ANKRUM: But actually, it was interesting, because it revealed an interest in Morris that is now expressing itself in light of his paintings, which are of a religious nature. But at that time, he was doing little drawings and sketches of Pietas and crucifixions and cathedrals. That was kind of interesting. But—

[00:08:08.56]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: Unusual for a child to [want to draw religious subjects. -Ed.]

[00:08:11.21]

JOAN ANKRUM: Yes. And even though he didn't know Durston very, very well, still the association, and knowing that he was an artist, and seeing his relationship to his work, he was fascinated. But Arthur Durston died very tragically in that home. And this is where this curious, coincidental thing that comes into this.

[00:08:41.88]

Soon after my gallery was established, I was talking to Lorser Feitelson and Helen Lundeberg about Morris's background. And I said—I asked them if they had ever heard of an artist named Arthur Durston. And they said, "Oh, yes. I knew him well." I said, "A very good artist and I gave him one of his first shows." And I said—I told him that the circumstances of Morris's relationship to him. And then I described the day that one of Durston's models had appeared at the house and couldn't rouse him. She knocked at the door, and she had an appointment to pose for him that day. And he didn't respond to her knockings. So Mrs. Ankrum, Morris's grandmother, went down to investigate, and couldn't rouse him either. And they finally realized that something very—

[00:09:38.80]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: Tragic.

[00:09:38.93]

JOAN ANKRUM: —tragic had happened. So they finally broke in the door and found him dead. And the truth of it is that he had so many years malnutrition that now he was eating well, and he couldn't—evidently, his system couldn't accommodate itself, adjust itself to this.

[00:09:58.11]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: The poor man.

[00:09:58.82]

JOAN ANKRUM: So he was quite young. He died about 44. But it was rather interesting, too, that Helen Lundeberg was the one who had brought the model to the house that day—

[00:10:13.01]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: On that morning.

[00:10:13.70]

JOAN ANKRUM: On that morning. She had dropped her at the house, and gone about her business. But it's so curious that [you bring his name into -Ed.] this conversation. But he left, of course, the family—various members of the family, several of his paintings.

[00:10:32.50]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: Oh, did he?

[00:10:32.58]

JOAN ANKRUM: I have several, and Morris's grandmother had several, and Morris's mother. And Morris also has quite a number—oh, maybe 30 or 40 drawings. And they're very fine. Very charming.

[00:10:47.25]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: Do you have photographs of them?

[00:10:48.99]

JOAN ANKRUM: No, we don't have any. We must do that. And at some time, we thought we'd have a memorial exhibition for him and borrow things back. But another thing that was really quite touching was the fact that he was still an English citizen.

[00:11:05.69]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: Oh, he was?

[00:11:06.77]

JOAN ANKRUM: Or maybe the fact that he'd been born in England. Well, I don't know that

he'd ever taken out citizenship.

[00:11:12.74]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: He probably wouldn't have had time.

[00:11:14.42]

JOAN ANKRUM: Would he have been eligible for WPA?

[00:11:16.46]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: I don't know.

[00:11:17.92]

JOAN ANKRUM: But all I know is that the English government came in, you see—

[00:11:21.92]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: When he died?

[00:11:23.36]

JOAN ANKRUM. Yes. To seal the room. Whenever there was a death, somehow the official procedure is to have the room—it has to be investigated, in case of foul play or something. But actually, they came in. And because he was a British subject, I guess they took away all these paintings. And it was really very sad, because there was no one in England. The only people who were interested in them at all—and that was a very casual interest, was a brother, and perhaps parents, who had completely ignored any messages from him.

[00:12:02.56]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: Then they had no reports of what he was doing at all.

[00:12:04.22]

JOAN ANKRUM: No. He'd sent back from time to time, copies of the *Los Angeles Sunday Supplement* sections to enclose a drawing, or a sketch, or a pastel that he was doing. And they would write back and thank him for the papers, and never mention the drawings.

[00:12:19.36]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: Oh, no.

[00:12:20.41]

JOAN ANKRUM: And this was so sad to think that all those paintings, then, were claimed by the British government and taken back to England. And I don't know what their fate was. They might have been just destroyed or lost.

[00:12:32.67]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: Some research student some time might come to the archives, and find this—

[00:12:37.21]

JOAN ANKRUM: Maybe.

[00:12:37.70]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: —and want to go to England and see if [inaudible] public—

[00:12:39.80]

JOAN ANKRUM: At least what happened when Morris's grandmother came to see that the room was ready for the next tenant, you see—she had this whole house that had been

turned into an apartment house, a small boarding house. Um—she found, back of the stairwell, quite a lot of his paintings, which he certainly would have left to her, because she had really supported him for about four years, you see, and given him a home, and food, so that at least he had a place to work. So we do have some—

[00:13:20.27]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: It's good that someone who appreciated his work has them.

[00:13:23.71]

JOAN ANKRUM: Yes, because I had bought one, as a matter of fact. I had bought one of those drawings. I guess I was one of the few at that who had, because I believe there are a few collections of his still in the area. And this is what I want to investigate sometime. And this is kind of a tribute to his memory.

[00:13:46.59]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: Well, I will be hunting for them here in the Archives, and I'll let you know.

[00:13:50.58]

JOAN ANKRUM: Yes. Good. Because he really was a fine artist—very fine artist.

[00:13:55.07]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: The Feitelsons and Lundeberg all spoke highly of him.

[00:13:57.81]

JOAN ANKRUM: Yes, they did. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. But I'm sure that he had many, many admirers in the art world at that time. And he was just beginning to get some recognition, thanks to the WPA.

[00:14:18.65]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: Well, had he taken his life, or—?

[00:14:21.04]

JOAN ANKRUM: Oh, no. He actually had died of—I really don't know what the official statement was. It was just natural causes.

[00:14:32.02]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: Could be a heart attack.

[00:14:32.11]

JOAN ANKRUM: It was natural causes, but he had all these years of malnutrition.

[00:14:35.49]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: Yes. Well, you spoke of it being a tragic thing, I suppose. [Inaudible.]

[00:14:38.17]

JOAN ANKRUM: Well, he was only 40—I think he was only 43.

[00:14:41.92]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: Oh, the poor fellow.

[00:14:42.37]

JOAN ANKRUM: And he had suffered without telling anybody. Nobody really knew that he was that ill. He was rather thin. But I believe that he had ulcers and all kinds of—

[00:14:57.97]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: Did he have any shows that you know of at the time that—do you remember hearing about?

[00:15:02.13]

JOAN ANKRUM: I think that Lorser Feitelson gave him quite a large show at some time in the '30s.

[00:15:08.20]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: I didn't realize Lorser had a gallery, you see.

[00:15:11.83]

JOAN ANKRUM: I think he also gave him a show at the L.A. Art Association. He may have shown him in this gallery that he was associated with before he went into the L.A. Art Association, which was the one that was affiliated—well, Stanley Rose had something to do with it.

[00:15:33.82]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: Stanley Rose?

[00:15:34.82]

JOAN ANKRUM: Yes, I believe.

[00:15:36.31]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: Oh, I see.

[00:15:38.81]

JOAN ANKRUM: I may be wrong. I'll have to check that with Lorser.

[00:15:41.63]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: I think I while I have you on the tape, I think it would be very interesting if you could tell me more about Morris. I think it's such a wonderful tribute to your faith and understanding of [inaudible]—

[00:15:52.67]

JOAN ANKRUM: Well, thank you.

[00:15:53.75]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: —the development of one of the leading artists in the country.

[00:15:55.68]

JOAN ANKRUM: Well, it certainly is a very unusual and a rare privilege for me to have this opportunity.

[00:16:04.36]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: I think it's a very moving thing when he wasn't even your own nephew by blood. I didn't realize that.

[00:16:09.68]

JOAN ANKRUM: No. Actually, he was a fascinating child, even if he hadn't been an artist. He was a fascinating youngster. He was so—he was so—he had great sweetness, and he was so alert, and eager for knowledge. And he just reached out, you know, and just absorbed everything that he came in contact with.

[00:16:35.94]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: Yeah. Did he go on to any other art schools?

[00:16:39.59]

JOAN ANKRUM: Well, what happened was that—as I say, because of his deafness, I wasn't able to place him in any conventional school. So I put him in this life class at the Pasadena Museum, in which Francis de Erdely was the instructor, and de Erdely recognized his talent immediately. I used to go with him. And I'd sit there to help with interpretation [laughs] and communication.

[00:17:07.92]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: Yeah.

[00:17:08.16]

JOAN ANKRUM: But I think about the second or third time we were there, here he was in a group of people who were professionals, or—most of them adults. Well, he was the only youngster in the group. But there were people who had spent many years working, and they were people with varied talents, varied degrees of talents. But he just had an unmistakable something you just can't explain, I guess. And when de Erdely came around to the easel, he turned to me and said, "This boy is a genius" [in Eastern European accent]. So of course, this was very exciting, because I had been working with him about six months up to that time. And the very first drawing he did was—

[00:17:58.20]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: You knew he was a genius, too. [Laughs]

[00:17:59.41]

JOAN ANKRUM: I did. It was just one of those exciting things. I was playing the piano, and I had jeans on. I was only about—I was still in my 20s. I was pretty young at the time. And he was, I'd say, about 14. And he did this little drawing, which could have been mistaken for a cartoon. But it just had that extra something that he would—

[00:18:26.14]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: [Inaudible] you at the [inaudible].

[00:18:28.10]

JOAN ANKRUM: It was actually the surety of line, and something that it was trying to say beyond just reporting. In other words, even that little drawing had something of himself that was unlike what anybody else would do.

[00:18:45.58]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: Sureness of line is still a very notable part of the talent—a great strength.

[00:18:50.59]

JOAN ANKRUM: Uh-huh [affirmative]. That's right.

[00:18:51.49]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: Yeah.

[00:18:51.97]

JOAN ANKRUM: And—

[00:18:53.05]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: And that tenderness you spoke of.

[00:18:54.91]

JOAN ANKRUM: Yes, that's right. Even now—

[00:18:56.35]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: [Inaudible] sweet child [cross talk.].

[00:18:57.61]

JOAN ANKRUM: [Inaudible] himself—

[00:18:57.80]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: Very unusual—

[00:18:58.80]

JOAN ANKRUM: It's great tenderness. He had like a balloon coming out of my mouth, like a cartoonist. And in it, the words said, "I love you, I love you, I love you."

[00:19:10.08]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: Aww. [Laughs.]

[00:19:11.45]

JOAN ANKRUM: And music coming out. And it was his expression of his feeling. [Cross talk.] But he was puzzled by my—he told me that he was quite puzzled at my great desire to have him continue and to really do something with this talent. And he said, "I didn't understand what you meant, what you were saying." He said it was when he was riding by himself on a train one day—I think he was going to Palo Alto to visit. And he said he was thinking and thinking. And he said, "What is it that Joan wants me to do? Why does she want me to be a great artist? Why?" And he said, "Then all of a sudden, I realized." In other words, he wanted to figure it out—what my reason was. And really, it was very difficult for me to explain this because there were so many—what shall I say, lapses of understanding—verbal understanding, and communication of ideas. [Cross talk.]

[00:20:25.11]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: [Inaudible] personally, or to give joy to others? Both things, of course happen.

[00:20:29.10]

JOAN ANKRUM: Well, actually, no. I think the only I was thinking about was because great talent is such a really rare thing, that you just want it to be realized.

[00:20:42.74]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: Yes.

[00:20:43.07]

JOAN ANKRUM: You want this—you want this—

[00:20:44.30]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: Potential.

[00:20:45.53]

JOAN ANKRUM: —potential, to be realized because it's very—it's so needed. And as soon as he understood that I didn't want it for fame or for fortune, or for anything, but just the realization of this—you know, a great gift. And so few people have it—and so few of us—and also a completely selfless idea of getting this across to people. And when he realized this, it helped him maintain his direction, because as soon as he would do something that I felt was—he said that I always said to him, "No, not that—this," you know. And he remembers a lot

of things, of course, that I don't remember saying to him if he—[Cross talk.].

[00:21:41.15]

I was so concerned that it didn't go into commercial art, which he could easily have done because he had great facility. And he had great color sense, and design sense, and composition, and was having a struggle financially, anyway. And somebody had to do this. Somebody had to keep him from, you know, the easy path.

[00:22:03.88]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: Well, eventually, this is why you opened a gallery.

[00:22:06.26]

JOAN ANKRUM: It really is. Yeah, I needed to give him a home—a sort of climate that would help him develop this, that he had. It has to be so carefully guarded in anybody. But naturally, in his position, being deaf, and being very vulnerable, if he had gotten into the wrong situation, he could easily have been exploited in the wrong direction. And after looking over the scene very carefully in New York, as well as some of the environments, I really was pretty much concerned with—

[00:22:47.58]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: [Inaudible].

[00:22:48.68]

JOAN ANKRUM: Yes, because it was such a personal need for understanding—anybody who has not been closely associated with a deaf person, born deaf, it's very difficult for them to understand.

[00:23:05.91]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: He does not have parents to help him—

[00:23:08.55]

JOAN ANKRUM: Well, actually he did. He had his mother, he loved very much. He loves her very much. But she had many—

[00:23:14.61]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: [Inaudible.]

[00:23:15.50]

JOAN ANKRUM: Well, she's a very intelligent woman, and as a matter of fact, had taught school. But she had many problems bringing up two half-sisters of Morris's—sisters by other marriages. And also—there aren't a great many people, I guess, who understand this particular area of art. I don't know. But I think she was eager for him to do anything that was helpful. But she didn't understand what he was trying to do. She understood it as long as it was academic, you know, as long as it was pretty much a realistic drawing.

[00:24:00.20]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: Classical [inaudible] book.

[00:24:01.58]

JOAN ANKRUM: Yes. And she could understand that. But she was very—had always been very, very grateful and appreciative of what I've been able to do for him. But everybody has a different contribution to make to an artist. I think, you know, everybody is important to [inaudible].

[00:24:19.96]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: I think it is so great what you've done for him. And it's helped so

many people, giving you this lovely gallery—

[00:24:26.26]

JOAN ANKRUM: It has.

[00:24:26.47]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: —and a chance to help so many other artists, too. It has never stopped.

[00:24:30.82]

JOAN ANKRUM: Actually—that's right.

[00:24:31.72]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: The initial giving has gone on far past what you dreamed.

[00:24:35.17]

JOAN ANKRUM: It certainly has. It had never occurred to me to have a gallery. If other people hadn't suggested it to me, and if Morris himself hadn't asked me—

[00:24:45.27]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: Oh, really?

[00:24:45.81]

JOAN ANKRUM: Yes. He—actually, there were several people. One of them was [Marie -Ed.] Appleton at the Whitney Museum, who's been with the Whitney Museum for years and years. And when we went to New York, I was telling her the whole story of Morris's background. That was when he was exhibiting there in New Talent, USA in 1960. At that time, he didn't have a gallery. And there were several who were eager to have him, but he was not at all interested. And so I was discussing this problem, I to find the right gallery for him. And she said, "Well, Mrs. Ankrum, you should do it. You should be his agent, and you should—" And I said, "Oh, I had really thought of it as a personal indulgence because I love doing this." And that's that old Puritan idea of anything that you really love to do, and anything that gives you great pleasure, you have a feeling of guilt about it.

[00:25:41.94]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: Yes. [Laughs.]

[00:25:42.21]

JOAN ANKRUM: But she pointed out to me that it was a responsibility to the—so you started it. It's up to you to see it through. And this was really—

[00:25:48.81]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: And you really came back and did it.

[00:25:50.43]

JOAN ANKRUM: Yes, and then when other people, like Dr. MacKinley Helm, you know, of Santa Barbara, who is very important in my life, and also in Morris's life, and he also urged art—

[00:26:02.82]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: Is he a museum director?

[00:26:03.68]

JOAN ANKRUM: He is an art biographer, and he was a collector, who died only a year ago. But he was very influential in the art world, in this whole area. He originally was from Boston.

He taught at Harvard. He taught religion and philosophy. But he was very, of course, always interested in art, and has written many books on art. He wrote a book on Marin and Dove. And he knew John Marin very well. He was a very close friend. He wrote a wonderful book on him, and Dove.

[00:26:37.33]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: And where did he know you and Morris?

[00:26:39.49]

JOAN ANKRUM: Well, he became acquainted with Morris's work at an exhibition at Stanford, which I had arranged for Morris, in about 1957, which was a very exciting show. And it was the first exhibition of Morris's work which expressed his own statement. He had broken away from his scholarly academic background, which was excellent. He had very rigid discipline in drawing. For seven years he just drew. Never touched color.

[00:27:14.88]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: Really? For seven years?

[00:27:16.08]

JOAN ANKRUM: For seven years, just drawing.

[00:27:17.78]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: Was this the de Erdely's inspiration?

[00:27:19.29]

JOAN ANKRUM: This was the de Erdely's stuff. Uh-huh [affirmative.] And he was, of course, a European. And he just was uncompromising and [inaudible] a great teacher, but—[Cross talk.]

[00:27:31.76]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: What a marvelous basis for any artist.

[00:27:33.41]

JOAN ANKRUM: It really was excellent. Now, maybe another artist wouldn't have—uh, felt the same way. But Morris feels that it was a great thing for him. I certainly do. And for seven years—then he had to break away and find his own means of expression—his own forms, which he did. He went through a period of two years of searching, and meditation without painting or drawing at all—just finding himself.

[00:28:05.61]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: Oh, really? How old was he then?

[00:28:06.83]

JOAN ANKRUM: He was about—

[00:28:08.79]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: Early twenties, probably?

[00:28:09.94]

JOAN ANKRUM: Yes, he was about 22, I think. But then after this period of self-search—in which period, he suffered quite a bit. He had quite a few emotional and psychological problems, economic problems. And—

[00:28:32.07]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: A period of time which is difficult for any person [growing up, but

must be severe for a -Ed.] person with a handicap—

[00:28:35.55]

JOAN ANKRUM: And during that time, he rejected me—not really emotionally so much as physically and economically, because he felt he had—

[00:28:45.15]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: To support himself.

[00:28:45.60]

JOAN ANKRUM: —he had to stand on his own feet. [Telephone ringing.] And I never, of course, tried to dissuade him from this, because I realized the necessity.

[00:28:54.21]

[Telephone ringing]

[00:28:54.70]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: You want to take that [inaudible]?

[00:28:56.63]

JOAN ANKRUM: Yeah. And of course, you know, I had never met anybody who was lucky enough to have this opportunity of watching. It's exciting to watch just a normal child develop—a normal gifted child. Yes, a gifted child, it's such a great challenge. And with somebody like Morris, it's all the more exciting and rewarding, because of this great purity of character that he has, combined with this really heroic courage. Because you see, when he was a small child, here was this great sweetness, and this inability to speak, so that the sounds that came out were really almost like animal sounds—guttural, and terrifying to some people.

[00:29:53.92]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: They didn't understand.

[00:29:55.39]

JOAN ANKRUM: No, they didn't understand. But you only had to be with him, and around him to recognize this bright mind, this eager—and it was the eagerness, I think, this eagerness of just reaching out, and to communicate, and this great appreciation of everything around us—the natural world, and the world of ideas, and all of these things. It was such an exciting thing to see, that anybody would have felt, you know, very lucky and privileged to be a part of it.

[00:30:32.95]

And so actually, when it came to the talent—well, of course, I always was terribly excited about his talent. And I used to talk to everybody I met about him—you know, the laundry man, the grocery man, and the woman across the back fence. And most of them didn't pay too much attention about him. I suppose they just thought that I was an over-enthusiastic auntie, you know, to this boy. [They laugh.] But gradually, they began to pay attention. So then, when he began to be recognized by museum people, and very knowledgeable people in the art world, then, of course, they did begin to pay a little more attention. But I can remember, when he finally got his really, national recognition—which was when he was invited by the Whitney Museum to show. And then *TIME Magazine* did a story, reproduced in color, a half-page color reproduction of one of his paintings. And I can remember feeling as though, well, I had reached Mount Olympus, you know. And I thought, well, this is it. My job is done.

[00:31:39.82]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: Yeah.

[00:31:40.51]

JOAN ANKRUM: And I said—Morris was about to leave for New York. And I said, "Well, Morris—" I felt so rewarded. I said, "I've done everything I can for you now. And now you're on your way. And you can just—you know, there's no place that you have to stop. It's up to you." And I said, "And now, goodbye. And it's just wonderful." And he said, "Oh, no." He said, "We're just beginning." He said, "You gave me my life. Now I'm going to give you yours."

[00:32:11.36]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: How perfectly wonderful.

[00:32:12.95]

JOAN ANKRUM: Yeah, and to this day, I can't help but be terribly moved by this, because even now, he still comes to me for—I don't know what it is, but some kind of assurance or appreciation. Whether I'm a sounding board, or whatever it is, he still turns to me, even though he's now 35. But I just feel that he—

[00:32:42.04]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: Well, you're a part of him.

[00:32:43.69]

JOAN ANKRUM: Yes, he—

[00:32:44.71]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: You're a part of his life, his painting—[audio distortion].

[00:32:48.66]

JOAN ANKRUM: But it is the only life. And I can remember saying to him once, "Oh, Morris, it's so wonderful." I said, "Even if you hadn't been—" but I think is a great artist. "Even if you hadn't been a great artist, it would have been wonderful if you had just—because it gives a means of communication, because—"

[00:33:07.29]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: Making him happy [inaudible]—

[00:33:08.07]

JOAN ANKRUM: —he said, "Oh, no—he said. "Oh, no. If I couldn't be a very, very fine artist, I would die. I would rather die." And he meant it. He said, I would rather not live if I couldn't be the finest kind of an artist. So that's what it means to him.

[00:33:30.12]

And another thing that was very interesting, which is very typical of the artist, I said, "Morris, What do you do when you have a problem in a painting, and you're trying to solve this problem?" I said, "What do you do? How do you work it out within yourself?" And he said with this great passion, you know, and great—almost like a prayer, he said, "I ask the canvas." He said, I plead. I sit there and I ask the canvas, what shall I do? Oh, you know, it was very exciting, because it was so full of feeling.

[00:34:10.22]

Another thing he said that was very delightful to me, which I'm sure many artists have this feeling about their work—he was working on a large canvas called "The Death of Christ," which is in the San Francisco Museum collection now. It's—I had to find a special home for him to paint this painting because we couldn't have canvases in the door of his little studio apartment. So I found a little place up the street. And he was working very hard on this painting. And it was just dusk, and I came to pick him up at the studio. And as we were leaving the studio, I looked up at the sky—here was this lovely twilight sky. And I said, "Morris, look, isn't that a beautiful sky?" And he looked up at the sky, and he looked at me.

And he said, "Mine's better." [They laugh.] He had been working on this beautiful sky, showing both the sun and the moon. And the continuation is really a crucifixion scene, you see. And he was so involved in his own sky that I think he [inaudible] [Cross talk.]

[00:35:20.04]

[Inaudible] And it was, of course, with humor. And he knew what he was saying. But I thought it was a wonderful expression of the artist's point of view. But much as he loved, and as important as nature is, it's his interpretation.

[00:35:31.52]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: It reminds me of something I read recently. Some artist whose name I've forgotten said that only God can make a tree. But God has never had to try to paint one. [Laughs.]

[00:35:40.61]

JOAN ANKRUM: Oh, that's wonderful. That's right. Yes, that's very true of the artist's feeling. I have the greatest appreciation of all my artists. All of them have this wonderful combination of reverence for their own talent, and humility.

[00:36:03.94]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: Isn't that fine?

[00:36:04.77]

JOAN ANKRUM: Yes. it's very moving, and of course accompanied by this great, childlike simplicity of spirit. And some of them are highly educated and articulate about their work. But all the best ones always have this wonderful [inaudible], and a childlike—where everything is just like a clean slate in their responses are those which are felt for the first time. As somebody said, the artist must have the heart of a child, but the hide of a rhinoceros to protect it.

[00:36:44.65]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: Well, in a certain sense, you were Morris's rhinoceros.

[00:36:47.85]

JOAN ANKRUM: That's right. [They laugh.] I think I was. I still have to agree.

[00:36:54.23]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: Well, it's so very interesting to come to hear your side of something like this. I think that such a story very rarely gets in the archives, or into the history of art. And it's so very, very important. It's just wonderful to have heard it.

[00:37:09.91]

JOAN ANKRUM: Well, thank you.

[00:37:11.20]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: There was an artist in the 19th century in San Francisco, a sculptor whose name [is Douglas Tilden -Ed.]. And I believe there are almost no records of how he developed, and he had the same problem as Morris.

[00:37:22.05]

JOAN ANKRUM: Is that so? I didn't know that.

[00:37:24.40]

BETTY LOCHRE HOAG MCGLYNN: But he's so great. If someone at the time had had the opportunity you've given us [inaudible] here today, there would be more understanding of his work. [Cross talk.] I'll give it to you.

[00:37:35.54]

JOAN ANKRUM: Oh, yeah, I'd love to know about him, because I don't know of him.

[00:37:38.06]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: Oh, really?

[00:37:38.27]

JOAN ANKRUM: This is a curious paradox in art, I think, that there have been very, very few fine artists who were born deaf.

[00:37:46.66]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: Well, this man was a sculptor and artist.

[00:37:49.10]

JOAN ANKRUM: Is that so?

[00:37:49.37]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: —[inaudible] San Francisco, in that area. And he was in the school where Morris went [in Berkeley -Ed.] when it was first founded.

[00:37:55.04]

JOAN ANKRUM: Really?

[00:37:56.12]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: And— [Cross talk.]

[00:38:00.09]

JOAN ANKRUM: Yeah, I'd like to know about it. Morris has often said that there was only one deaf friend in his whole life who had an interest in art. And that wasn't really a profound interest. It, you know, turned into commercial art. But very few of them seem to understand or to have the grasp of what fine art is or can be. I really don't know why. Maybe they just need that extra help.

[00:38:29.79]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: Probably there hasn't been anyone to help.

[00:38:30.47]

JOAN ANKRUM: Yes, I imagine.

[00:38:31.80]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: And Morris never could have known this man because he was dead —

[00:38:34.68]

JOAN ANKRUM: No.

[00:38:34.89]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: —long before he was born, probably.

[00:38:37.29]

JOAN ANKRUM: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative]. That's very interesting. Well, thank you again.

[00:38:40.89]

BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG: Just fascinating.

[END OF TRACK AAA_ankrum64_8336_m .]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]